

An Imperial Intelligence Union As a Means of Promoting the Consolidation of the Empire



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AN IMPERIAL INTELLIGENCE UNION, AS A MEANS OF PROMOTING THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE EMPIRE.*

THERE has lately been issued by order of Parliament a sessional paper on the establishment of an Imperial Intelligence Service and a system of Empire Cables. The subject with which this paper deals should be of interest to all lovers of our Empire as it contemplates the establishment of a globe-encircling system of state-owned cables, together with an Imperial intelligence department as a means of advancing the consolidation of the Empire.

For some years we have had a good deal of writing and talking about Imperial consolidation, with suggestions more or less definite for the formation of an Imperial Council, or other representative assembly, which might take special cognizance of those interests that affect the Empire at large, and in whose deliberations the views of each part of the Empire might be heard. In order, however, to prepare the way for any forward movement in this direction it is absolutely necessary that the different parts of the Empire, both the mother country and the Greater Britain beyond the seas, should possess a fuller and more accurate knowledge of each other than they have yet attained. No doubt such information is spreading. Australia, Canada and South Africa are better known in England and to each other to-day than they were even a few years ago. But there is still so much to be desired in this respect that it seems utterly vain to talk of the closer consolidation of the Empire until its various component parts become more fully acquainted with each other. The information at present given by the press of these several countries concerning each of them, from day to day and from week to week, is as slight as if the countries were in no wise connected. If the newspapers throughout the lands that float the Union Jack could give their readers as full information regarding the different parts of the Empire as the papers of the United States give regarding the ongoings in the several States, it would bring the British people into such close touch with each other that the problems connected with Imperial consolidation would soon become easy of solution. Mutual knowledge would lead to closer friendship and to unity of sentiment

*Parliamentary Return embracing a communication to the Right Hon. the Earl of Elgin, Secretary of State for the colonies, from Sir Sandford Fleming, with other documents appended thereto. Sessional paper No. 67, 63 pages.

and of purpose, so that wise and well considered action could be taken towards more intimate relations in trade and government.

The proposal set forth in this lately published State Paper is "that all the self-governing British communities in both hemispheres be brought into direct electric touch with each other and all with the mother country; that cable-telegraphs should connect each adjacent or proximate community, in such a manner as to constitute with the connecting land lines a continuous chain of telegraph around the globe, and thus admit of messages being sent in either direction from any one British state to any other British state. This globe-encircling chain of telegraph cables would extend from England to Canada and thence to New Zealand, Australia, India, South Africa and the West Indies, returning to England by way of Bermuda with a branch to Nova Scotia or Newfoundland. That this system of connecting lines may be of the highest Imperial advantage it is essential that it be wholly state-owned and state-controlled." The estimates go to show that the cost of the whole circle of cable telegraph proposed would not exceed £5,000,000.

If such a system of cables were once established, they might be used daily for the transmission of general intelligence during the hours when they were not required for commercial service. This intelligence might be furnished by a department to be formed for the purpose, which might act in harmony with those who supply information for the press, and which might secure in the different countries interested the publication of intelligence regarding matters of leading importance. In one of the documents in this State Paper it is suggested that the headquarters of such an intelligence department would naturally find its proper place in England. "Besides the Imperial Board of Intelligence in London, possibly branch boards would be desirable in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, India, Africa, the West Indies, and elsewhere. All the boards should consist of representative and independent public men, whose duty it would be to obtain for dissemination over the Empire accurate information and unbiassed opinions on all subjects of general interest; the information so obtained would be cabled daily or weekly as may be determined to the London board and to all the branch boards for publication. Some such organization would become a most potent Imperial agency. It would prove to be an invaluable means of educating our people everywhere respecting the life, opinions and aspirations of all our fellow subjects in the several parts of the Empire. It would directly place before each section of the British world the views formed or forming in all other sections. Two hours a day would

easily admit of 10,000 or 12,000 words being transmitted each week. This full volume of news published simultaneously in the chief centres of the Empire would have a wonderful influence. The good to result from a mutual interchange of information and sentiment is beyond calculation. Obviously it would steadily have a unifying tendency if every day in the year the pulsations of the great heart of the motherland could be felt by kith and kin beyond the seas, and if also every man within as well as without the central kingdom could read in his morning paper the same sympathetic evidences of interest in the common welfare, and all fresh from his fellow subjects in all quarters of the globe."

Whatever diversity of opinion may be developed as to the best way of managing such a service and of preparing the statements that may be issued from day to day or from week to week for the information of the various parts of the British Empire, there could be no doubt as to the desirability of some such department as is here proposed. The system of cables would be of the greatest value in connection with the extension of commerce between the countries thus related, and even from this point of view would seemingly prove a provitable investment, as, according to evidence submitted in the Parliamentary Return, the charges for over-sea messages by the great circle of Empire cables would be greatly reduced. In addition to the commercial value of the scheme it would serve, as has been said, to make the different parts of the Empire more intimately acquainted with each other, so that with increasing mutual knowledge there might come increased confidence, closer correspondence of national ideals with growing unity of purpose and of life.

The testimony on this point that is given in the paper before us is really surprising. The proposal has received the endorsement of Chambers of Commerce and of many prominent representative men. At the Fifth Congress of the Chambers of Commerce of the Empire held at Montreal in August, 1903, it was unanimously approved, and it was recognized that such an inter-Imperial line of communication "would constitute the most effective means by which the several governmental units of the Empire may hold communion with each other whenever they desire, and that while it would be of the highest importance to the commercial and social interests of the British people around the world, it would, by the subtle force of electricity, at once promote the consolidation of the Empire and prove an indispensable factor in Imperial unity." This view was again confirmed at the sixth congress of Chambers of Commerce recently held in London.

But while the resolutions of Chambers of Commerce may fitly

represent the opinions of manufacturers, merchants and other business men, more surprising even than their testimony is that of over fifty representative Canadians from very different departments and connections in life, whose letters on the subject are here presented, men who are outside the sphere of commercial life and who agree in regarding the scheme as thoroughly practicable and of the greatest importance.

The writers are all well known men of prominent position and they appear to have been selected for the reason that they are removed from the active politics of the day. The evidence furnished is presented in this valuable parliamentary paper in four groups, embracing A, Statesmen; B, Judges; C, Heads of Universities and Colleges; and D, Prominent Clergymen. Group A contains the views of three lieutenant-governors: (1) His Honour Sir Henry G. Joly de Lotbiniere, Lieut-Governor of British Columbia; (2) His Honour the late Alfred G. Jones, Lieut-Governor of Nova Scotia; (3) His Honour Wm. Mortimer Clark, Lieut.-Governor of Ontario. To these may now be added His Honour D. C. Fraser, Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia, whose views appear in Group A as a Supreme Court Judge of Nova Scotia. There are four French-Canadians in this group, embracing M. H. A. A. Brault, President de la Chambre de Commerce du district de Montreal; M. J. George Garneau, present Mayor of Quebec; Very Rev. Monsignor Laflamme, of Laval University; and Benjamin Sulte, ex-President of the Royal Society of Canada. We find also in this group the names of Sir William C. Macdonald and Dean Bovey, of McGill University; Sir William P. Howland, P.C., and Colonel Denison, of Toronto; Professor Adam Shortt of Queen's University, and the late Sir Robert Thorburn, formerly Premier of Newfoundland.

It is interesting to note, by way of illustration, the views expressed by some of these gentlemen. Their testimony on such a matter is too valuable to be confined to a parliamentary blue-book. Thus, His Honour the Lieut.-Governor of Ontario, writes:

The dissemination of more information regarding each other among the colonies than at present prevails, is a condition precedent to any successful effort being made for a closer imperial union. I may venture to say that the people of the Motherland require to be educated regarding this subject quite as much as do the Colonies; the ignorant indifference of apparently intelligent persons in Britain regarding the vast interests involved in the unification of our Empire is lamentable.

The plan you advocate for the telegraphic transmission of intelligence among our various dependencies must commend itself as one which will do much to prepare the minds of the people for at some future time adopting some plan for carrying out a closer union between the numerous nationalities which form our great Empire.

Monsignor Laflamme writes:—

You are right in saying that before trying to unite the various national elements of the Empire, it is prudent and even necessary to make these elements acquainted with each other. I imagine that by going too fast we might reach the opposite extreme. A solid public opinion, the only kind on which one can safely count, is not a thing that can be improvised; still less can it be imposed. It can only be reached by long and patient effort.

Evidently the first step to take, is to circulate abundantly all information calculated to spread knowledge throughout the Empire and make known the mind of the various populations. Then only we may be able to say what scheme is fit for realization, and in what measure.

Allow me to say that the Province of Quebec would be specially glad of the creating of such a Bureau of Information.

M. J. G. Garneau writes:—

I believe that it is in the common interest of England and her Colonies to draw as closely as possible the ties of commercial relationship, which give a practical basis for that feeling of interdependence and solidarity which is the best safeguard of the common weal. As the glorious constitution under which we live was gradually evolved from the teachings of experience, so must the idea of imperial unity be arrived at by the aspiration of the component elements, united by the comprehension of their common interests. In order to arrive at this comprehension, it is essential that ignorance and prejudice be dispelled, and any means tending to this end must be a step in the right direction. The British Empire embraces many races and languages, and the spirit of loyalty to a common Crown and Government must be fostered by a broad and just tolerance of the individual characteristics and legitimate aspirations of its component races.

An Imperial Intelligence Department, such as suggested, to centralize and distribute *reliable* information, cannot but do much good, and your idea about the chain of Empire Cables seems a very practical step towards the realization of that object.

Sir William C. Macdonald writes:—

I can find only words of commendation for what you have written, especially the point you make of laying as speedily as practicable a chain of State-owned Cables and Telegraphs to link together the Mother Country and all her outlying Colonies. This is really the first step to be taken, binding together with cords of steel, and affording time for reflection as to what should follow next. These cables will be to the Empire, what the nerves are to the human body.

M. Benjamin Sulte writes:—

The great question of the day is the unification of the Empire—the more perfect union of all the parts. But the parts do not know one another. So long as this ignorance of one State or Province in regard to another remains, with all the prejudices it engenders, so long will it be perfectly impossible to accomplish anything practical and lasting. Let us commence by getting to know one another. It is too early for a Council; it is just the time for an Intelligence Department, together with a Cable Service linking the principal groups of the Colonies to the Mother Country. This first step being taken, and some knowledge acquired thereby, we will see how to proceed further in the direction of mutual arrangements, if then found possible.

Group B consists wholly of judges, headed by Chancellor Sir John Boyd, President of the High Court of Justice of Ontario, and it includes distinguished jurists from the Provinces of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan, and also from Newfoundland.

Chancellor Sir J. A. Boyd expresses more or less closely the

sentiments of the other ten judges who are included in this Group when he says:

I favour any method or movement which will bring or tend to bring the Mother Country and her outlying members into closer and more sympathetic relations. The scheme suggested by you of a system of telegraphic ocean cables whereby intercommunication may be had amongst all parts of the Empire with the maximum of speed and the minimum of expense, recommends itself as furthering greatly this end of bringing all parts into closer touch with the centre, and the centre with all the parts. Besides this, let all other means be used to dispel the common ignorance of each other now so greatly prevailing, and to bring in mutual knowledge and confidence which will follow better acquaintanceship. Care being taken on all sides to avoid any revolutionary jar, the future appears full of promise for the steady growth of a closer and more intelligent union between England and the English speaking Colonies—which shall shape for itself that outward form best fitting and expressing the living political organism which it embodies.

The Hon. Justice Landry, of the Supreme Court of New Brunswick, writes:—

I have no hesitation in arriving at the conclusion that the scheme is in the best interests of the Empire, if the details can be worked out. The subject is very important. My best wishes are with you and its promoters for its success.

The Hon. Justice Russell, of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia, writes:—

I have read your letters and hasten to say that I am in entire accord with every word in them, and thank you sincerely for giving me the opportunity to read them.

The Hon. Chief Justice Sullivan, of the Supreme Court of P. E. Island, writes:—

I have read your letters with much interest, and I desire to say that I fully share your views with regard to the advantage which the Empire would derive from the operations of such an Intelligence Department.

In Group C are given exclusively the views of the Principals of twelve Canadian seats of learning. Extracts from the letters of a few of these may illustrate the opinions generally expressed.

The Rev. Dr. Bland, of Wesley College, Winnipeg:—

"The first thing to be secured for the development and strengthening of Imperial Unity is that the various parts of the Empire should be brought to know each other better. Out of that will come a deeper sympathy. That sympathy is the essential thing whether it give birth to an Imperial Council or find a better organ in consultation among the Premiers. But that is a question which one need not precipitately settle. The first need is fuller and closer intimacy, and to this, probably nothing would contribute so effectively as a Free Press Cable Service around the world."

Principal Falconer, Presbyterian College, Halifax:—

"I think there can be no doubt that while we hope strongly for a larger Imperial Unity in the not very distant future, at present the only safe and really effective method of promoting it, is to increase our knowledge of, and friendship for, one another throughout the Empire, that it will ere long be seen by the various parts of His Majesty's dominion that a closer union of some sort is supremely reasonable. We may allow time, perhaps almost unconsciously, to work out the comprehensive plan."

President Ian C. Hannah, King's College, Windsor, N.S.:—

"I am enthusiastically in agreement with the views you express. In

South Africa, Canada, and other parts of the Empire where I have resided, I have been much impressed by the purely local character of most of the contents of the newspapers. Newspaper men are unanimous in telling me it is a question of money; it costs so much more to get distant telegrams than to publish local gossip. On all grounds I feel the value of the suggestion of Free Press news within the limits of the Empire and devoutly hope the scheme may be realized in no distant future."

Principal MacLaren, Knox College, Toronto:—

"I am glad to find myself largely in accord with the views set forth in your letter. The Imperial question is forcing itself on the attention of all thoughtful subjects of the British Crown. Not very long ago the attempt to unite more closely by political bonds the scattered portions of the British Empire seemed scarcely within the range of practical statesmanship. But the modern applications of steam and electricity are drawing the distant parts of the earth so closely together that what was formerly impracticable seems daily to grow more feasible. In matters of this kind, however, it is especially necessary not to outrun public opinion. To bring all parts of the Empire into intelligent and sympathetic touch with each other, should certainly be the first step towards closer political relations, and your proposal for an Imperial Intelligence Department and a Free Press Cable Service seems eminently fitted to prepare the way for those closer political relations to which we should look."

Monsignor O. E. Mathieu, C.M.G., Rector of Laval University, Quebec:—

"Allow me to offer you my most sincere congratulations on the right ideas you express in regard to the prudence required in dealing with an enlightenment of public opinion, especially when we consider the state of ignorance which exists throughout our vast Empire concerning each of its different parts. To dispel this ignorance is an excellent work."

Principal Patrick, of Manitoba College, Winnipeg:

"I am a profound believer in the unity of the Empire and I desire to further that unity in all possible ways, but I am convinced that the people of the Empire are not ripe even for the formation of an Imperial Council, and that anything in the shape of a constitution interfering with the free action of the different nationalities would do harm rather than good. The constitution of the Empire must be a growth, arising out of the needs and interests of the times. It will come naturally, so to speak, when the people are educated for it. If it is to come soon; if the unity which all desire is to be more than a name and an aspiration; the dissemination of sound and full information touching the views, habits, products, and needs of the different peoples will be of essential service. Hence I look with the greatest favour on the suggestion of an Imperial Intelligence Department, believing that such a Department wisely officered and administered would do much to unite the different portions of the Empire by furnishing them with the truths and facts which would form the basis for common conclusions and common action. To the forces thus generated I attach a higher value than to anything which may be advised in the shape of an experimental constitution."

The late Principal Sheraton, Wycliffe College, Toronto:—

"Imperial unity, however, must be a growth. Whatever form it takes, it must be the expression of the inner life and conviction of the country. You cannot secure it merely by legislation. There must be a community of sentiment and conviction and this can only be promoted by a more intimate knowledge and by getting the different parts of the Empire into closer touch with one another. * * * Whatever form the political development assumes, nothing can be done without mutual knowledge, and whatever helps to promote that mutual knowledge and to bring the various Provinces and Dependencies of the Empire into closer touch with one another is not only most desirable but it is essential to any advance in the right direction. The establishment of an Imperial Intelligence Department would be a splendid step

in the right direction. What we want to do is to dissipate ignorance and to bring all these races and dependencies into touch with one another."

Group D gives the opinions of sixteen of the leading clergymen of Canada. Two of these are Roman Catholic Archbishops, seven are Church of England Bishops, and the remainder are Methodists and Presbyterians, including four ex-Moderators of the Presbyterian Church. The views expressed by these can best be given in a few extracts from their letters. The Bishop of Algoma says:—

"Nothing in my judgment is more needed or better calculated to promote the cause of Imperial unity and progress, than the proposal you have laid before me in your letters. And I am firmly convinced that you are right in saying that, for the present, what we should seek first and above all else is a better knowledge of each other as the true basis upon which Imperial Institutions may be built securely when the time is ripe."

Rev. Dr. Armstrong, of Ottawa:—

"I hail with patriotic delight anything that will tend to bring the various parts of our great Empire into closer and more sympathetic union. It seems to me you have put first things first when you advocate an Imperial Intelligence Department. It is certainly in the line of progress and pre-eminently safe. The opportune time will come for something more, but Unions on paper without carrying the intelligence are unsafe and often hurtful."

Rev. Dr. Barclay, St. Paul's Church, Montreal:—

"My sympathies are entirely and enthusiastically with you in your wise and practical proposals."

Rev. Dr. Milligan, Toronto:—

"I think the Greater Britain must be a growth, like its predecessor, in order to be healthy and strong. Men are too ready to intermeddle with Providence. He that believeth in a Great British future will not make haste. The spread of knowledge in the way you indicate and the assimilations which time alone can effect are the surest means of giving us an Empire, which I trust God will use as a mighty instrument in the promotion of peace and prosperity in the world."

The late Archbishop O'Brien, of Halifax:—

"It seems to me your proposal, in your letters addressed to the Canadian Club, is practicable, and would be a first step towards unity of the Empire."

The Bishop of Nova Scotia:—

"Your proposals are fully in accord with my own views. The strangely vague ideas which residents in different parts of the Empire have of each other, and their various resources and capabilities, would readily give place to a definite conception of the possibilities of all. Your proposals are both sensible and practical."

The Bishop of Niagara:—

"I am in hearty agreement with your views. * * * There is no doubt that the Imperial Intelligence Department must precede the formation of an Imperial Council, and in fact lead up to it. The former can be entered upon immediately, and with small expense. It will be the forerunner of the latter. I am sure that on this point the largest possible consensus of opinion will be with you."

The Bishop of Ottawa:—

"There can be no doubt that free and frequent intercourse between the people in all parts of the Empire must promote that nearer acquaintance which produces and promotes mutual confidence and which will bring us all in one; and the intelligent, powerful union of the British Empire means a great deal not only for the English-speaking people, but for the nations of the world generally."

Rev. Dr. Potts, Toronto:—

“There is no doubt that this movement is growing and is tending more and more to the unity of the Empire. Imperial Unity is not a thing to be hurried too fast, but nothing will tend to draw the various parts of the Empire together as much as information.”

From these extracts, which are more or less fully endorsed in the other letters referred to, it seems clear that men who may fairly be regarded as representing the educated opinion of Canada are in remarkable agreement upon this subject. It might, indeed, be difficult to find any other subject on which all these writers would be so cordially and emphatically agreed. This fact may in no small measure affect the views of thoughtful men in other parts of the British Empire. For ourselves, we hope that those who have been most actively engaged in bringing this important matter before the notice of Canadians may find it attract the lively and sympathetic interest of British subjects everywhere. To quote once more from one of the documents in this state paper regarding the expressions of opinion already referred to. “The views expressed by these gentlemen may fairly be regarded as the voice of Canada. They are in substantial agreement with the recorded opinions of the commercial men of the Empire, and it can scarcely be doubted that they will be found in accord with prevailing opinions in the United Kingdom, in New Zealand, in Australia, and in South Africa. All heard from are substantially of one mind as to the establishment of a great channel of communication, linking together in an electric girdle the self-governing British communities. They appear to think that it is of transcendent importance to inaugurate an Imperial Cable Service, which, while satisfying in the highest degree the needs of commerce, would at the same time perform the functions of a continuous spinal cord encircling the globe, by and through which would freely flow every national aspiration, every sympathetic impulse of the British people in every longitude and latitude.”

With all of which we heartily agree.

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